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ABSTRACT

Demographic, economic, and educational indicators, especially as shown in the Marion County Youth Study, suggest that strategies that deal with the problems of rural youth and which assume mobility to metropolitan areas may be outmoded and inadequate. Outmigration is, however, faced by many rural youth and its success is dependent upon formal credentials. There is need for a strategy which combines educational preparation, opportunities for enhancing successful outmigration, and innovative public employment. In particular, a new careers program in the human services area could provide untrained non-metropolitan workers with a variety of lower level positions (research assistants, teacher aides, nurses' aides) while providing on-the-job training. Such a program would offer non-metropolitan youth a means to develop both skills and status, achieve personal realization and dignity, and learn skills marketable in both metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas. It is a method through which non-metropolitan areas themselves would benefit. Because much training would be at existing agency structures, limited rural resources could be stretched. While removing persons from the group needing human services, the new careers program would provide additional staff members at lower cost and gradually improve the quality of the staff in non-metropolitan areas. (SB)

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Some Thoughts on Work and Education Among Non-metropolitan Youth

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Introduction

In a nation that is overwhelmingly metropolitan both in population and in outlook, it can be difficult to draw attention to issues involving non-metropolitan areas. It is certainly no easy task to obtain an accurate and detailed analysis of problems found in such areas. Problems of rural youth, and their educational and occupational development, only serve to illustrate this case.

To be sure, some part of the problems of young persons in the hinterlands of the nation are an extension of problems faced by all youth. The fundamental transformation of the economy, and the attendant altered occupational structure, has created a chronic problem of unemployment that has affected youth in metropolitan and non-metropolitan settings alike since the early 1960's. Put most directly, jobs for young persons have disappeared, both in and out of cities.

Yet, the form that this takes, and especially the solutions that might be considered, are affected dramatically by the setting. The distinctive features of rural life give stark shape to the problem of unemployment that emerges in such contexts, and provides both human limits and resources that must be considered in the development of meaningful solutions.

Some Background Considerations

Size and Growth

Analysis of the problem of non-metropolitan youthful employment requires, first, some understanding of these settings. The term itself, and the inevitable confusion it implies, is indicative of some of the problems being identified. "Non-metropolitan" is not defined positively to take into account the nature of life in smaller life settings available in this country. This leaves the vocabulary woefully inadequate for dealing with the diversity of populations that lie outside of the boundaries of metropolitan areas.

The hinterlands contain, actually, a wide array of different social and life conditions. There are the rural farm areas, although these vary from widely scattered wheat farms to the quite different and more compact array found among citrus or avocado groves. There are the small towns organized around such extractive activity such as fishing, mining or logging (each with distinctive cultural and social elements). There are the small cities that serve as business, communication, transport, and in many instances, governmental centers, in the outlying counties and states of the country.

If there is a practical reality which forces discussion of

such diversity under the single concept of "non-metropolitan," at least it can be acknowledged that the result places us in an analogous position to the Eskimo confronted with but a single word for snow -- it's primarily useful for those without familiarity with the phenomenon.

Given these limitations, what are some of the basic background features of the population that can be identified? First, there are in fact a great number of individuals in the United States who are non-metropolitan, a total of 63 million residing in such environments in 1970, according to the U.S. Census (and using its definitions), this being just under one-third (31 per cent) of the total population. (U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, 1975: 3, Table A). Second, there has over the years been a significant and consistent decline in the non-metropolitan population. For example, since 1940, the proportion of the population contained in rural areas has gone from 47.4 to 43.9 in 1950, 37.0 in 1960, 31.4 in 1970, and then to 27.2 in 1974(U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, 1975: 3, Table A).

Third, there is some indication that in very recent years, there is beginning to be a change in the pattern of mobility in the United States. Between 1970 and 1974, when overall rates of change are considered, the actual rate of growth was <u>greater</u>

for non-metropolitan areas than was the case for metropolitan areas--5.0 per cent change compared to 3.6, respectively (U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, 1975: 5, Table E).

Just to keep the record clear, however, it should be pointed out that the overall "metropolitan" figure is deceptive. In actuality, the central cities of the large metropolitan areas have suffered a net loss of population, while at the same time the suburban growth rates of metropolitan areas are quite higher, higher in fact than the rural areas.

What these figures suggest are that, on the one hand, independent of population shifts, the close to one-third of the population residing in non-metropolitan areas merit attention, while on the other, the initial signs of a shift in population movements and growth suggest that strategies for dealing with the problems of rural youth which assume mobility of such individuals to metropolitan areas may be outmoded and inadequate.

Economic Indicators

The general pattern of economic indicators shows a general pattern of slight disadvantage of non-metopolitan populations. One of the more notable indicators is income, and in this arena we obtain rather sharp differences. The 1973 median family income

for individuals residing in non-metropolitan areas in 1974 was $10,327, a figure womewhat lower than the median of $11,343 reported for residents of Central Cities, and well below the $14,007 reported for persons residing in the Suburban Rings. (U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Census, 1975: 15, Table P).

Closely related is the finding that poverty is somewhat more common in rural, in contrast to urban areas. While non-metropolitan areas comprised less that 30 per cent of the total population in 1973, in that same year 40.1 per cent of all persons falling below the poverty line were residents of such areas. (U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, 1975: 16, Table R).

Putting it another way, while in 1973 the average proportion of individuals for the nation as a whole below the poverty line was 13.7 per cent, for non-metropolitan areas close to one individual in every five (19.1 per cent) fell below this line. (U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, 1975: 16, Table R).

One factor which has a dramatic effect on the economic structure of rural areas has been the tremendous increase in productivity of such areas, without a corresponding increase in demand, which would call for a simultaneous increase in employment. As one economist observes:

"Gross factor productivity, i.e., output in ratio to all inputs, has risen sharply and continously since 1920. Even more spectacularly, the charted indexes of total labor input and of output per man-hour have diverged at almost right angles since 1940. If agricultural output had faced an indefinitely expansible market, total production could have been more greatly increased and thereby enabled the retention of a greater proportion of the earlier farm labor force. But the market had not had sufficient absorptive capacity to offset gains in productivity; consequently, the intermediating mechanism relating increases in productivity to labor force adjustments has been the generally adverse farm price and income outlook. Given this outlook, thousands of farm youth have had to decide, individually, whether to stay with the family occupation, and fewer thousands of farmers have had to decide, also individually, whether to continue." (Fuller, 1970: 20).

Education is another arena in which sharp difference obtain between non-metropolitan and metropolitan populations. In 1974, in the nation as a whole, 53.9 per cent of non-metropolitan individuals over age 25 had completed a high school education, contrasted with 59.8 per cent in Central Cities and 68.5 in the Suburban Rings. Within this non-metropolitan group, more exacting breakdowns stretch out these differentials. In counties with no place larger than 2,500, only 42.5 per cent of the adults have completed high school, compared with 52.8 in counties with a place place beteen 2,500 to 24,999 and 62.0 ih those designated non-

metropolitan that have a place of 25,000 or more (U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Census, 1975: 54, Table 9).

It should be noted, as Irwin Sanders observes, that even these figures are a bit deceptive, since currently at age 16 or 17, just as high a proportion of young persons are enrolled in school as is the case for urban youth of the same age, so that the drop-off occurs rapidly after that period, resulting in significantly lower proportions enrolled in higher education (Sanders, 1977: 103).

This is consistent with a great number of studies which have shown significantly lower levels of educational aspiration among rural and farm adolescents (Nelson, 1973: 7-15; Mueller, 1974: 362-371; Schwarzweller, 1976: 194-215; Slocum, 1967: 269-277; Haller and Sewell, 1967: 37-55; Bender, Hobbs and Golden, 1967: 278-289).

The Marion County Youth Study, which has drawn data from an ongoing longitudinal investigation of youth in a medium-sized county (1960 population: 120,888) in the Pacific Northwest, has found that the 19 incorporated communities located within the county's 1,175 square miles accounted for only 59 per cent of all its residents. The balance of the population resided in unincorporated areas, primarily rural. Aside from the Central City, which accounted for about half of the population, the

incorporated communities were predominantly small. Two-thirds had fewer than 1,000 inhabitants, and only one of them, the Central City, had more than 5,000.

A 25 per cent random sample was drawn from a sample frame consisting of all male sophomores enrolled in the schools of the county in 1964. From a total of 309 subjects selected, 284 usable interviews were obtained, giving a response rate of 92 per cent. The one-hour interviews conducted by the project staff members covered a range of demographic, school, family, work and peer variables. To these data were added grade point average from school transcripts and delinquency reports from juvenile court records. Extensive questionnaire data have been collected from the youth each year subsequently (85 per cent of the original sample responded to the 10th annual mailing), as well as official records of adult law violations.

What do the Marion County data tell us about the adjustment of non-metropolitan youth to early adulthood? First, consistent with the suggestions of the literature, a good percentage of these young persons have, in fact, been confronted with the reality of moving. A special tally of the most recent data available indicates that by the time ten years has passed since their high school graduation, just over half, 52 per cent, of these young persons now reside outside of the county (the percentage being

identical for those from the urban and rural areas of the county).

At the same time, significant percentages of these young persons have done well in terms of significant economic and social indicators, with roughly one-fourth finishing at least a four year degree (27 per cent), and over half (52 per cent) occupying white collar positions.

As might be expected, educational attainment is a key to occupational success. Among those who did well in high school (i.e., those grades that fell about a "C" average), 37 per cent were able to complete college; where among those with low levels of academic achievement, only one per cent completed a college degree, and none of those who dropped out of school did so.

Similar patterns obtain for occupational attainment. Among those who did well in high school, 61 per cent were working in white collar jobs, in contrast with 27 per cent of those with low academic achievement, and 24 per cent of those who withdrew from high school. A closely related factor is job satisfaction. It is perhaps not surprising that it was those who did well in school (and who thus hold the better jobs) who are the most satisfied with their present position, 69 per cent of this group indicating that they are "satisfied with their present job," contrasted with 58 per cent of the low academic performers, and 49 per cent of the high school drop-outs.

Interestingly enough, high school academic performance is also related to where the individual chooses to live. Somewhat more of the high achievers live in metropolitan or urban setting as young adults (57 per cent) than is true for the low academic achievers (44 per cent) or the drop-outs (38 per cent). At the same time, a common theme for all of these individuals is a preference to live in either a rural or small town context (55 per cent of the total group), this preference being high for the drop-outs (45 per cent), for the low achievers (58 per cent) and for the high achievers (53 per cent), even though this latter group is more likely to actually reside in urban areas.

At the present time, current data are not available on the issue of migration out of the rural and urban areas of Marion County. Some information can be derived from analysis of such groups made at the point where these young persons were five years out of high school (1972). Here we can make contrasts between six groups: Rural Non-migrants, Rural Migrants to Urban (small city) Areas, Rural Migrants to Metropolitan Areas, Urban Migrants to Rural Areas, Urban Migrants to Metropolitan Areas, and Urban Non-migrants.

Looking, first, at the issue of educational attainment, the findings indicate that the lowest levels of attainment are found among the Rural Non-migrants (less than half, 43 percent, achieving

a level of education beyond high school), while the highest levels are found among the Urban Metropolitan Migrants (82 per cent having some education beyond high school), with the other groups falling in the middle (the proportion achieving some level of education beyond high school being 54 per cent of the Rural Urban Migrants, 61 per cent for the Rural Metropolitan Migrants, 59 per cent for the Urban Non-migrants and 65 per cent of the Urban Rural Migrants).

At this point in their careers it was too early to determine levels of actual occupational achievement, but the occupational expectations were close to what would be expected from the education achievement. The group showing the highest expectation of achievement of white collar positions were the Urban Metropolitan Migrants, 71 per cent with such expectations, with all other groups displaying levels of white collar expectation in, roughly, the 50 per cent range.

A key issue here, also, seemed to be where the individuals saw employment opportunity. Metropolitan Migrants were significantly more likely to answer affirmatively when asked if they thought that "good jobs" were to be found "in the cities," 53 per cent of the Urban Metropolitan Migrants and 44 per cent of the Rural Metropolitan Migrants agreeing to this question, these responses being in contrast to the other groups, especially the Rural Non-

migrants, 34 per cent, the Rural Urban Migrants 26 per cent, and the Urban Rural Migrants, 34 per cent.

Also, as might be expected, when asked where these individuals would prefer to live, the highest proportions indicating they prefer to live in rural areas or small towns are found among the Rural Non-migrants (94 per cent) and the Urban Rural Migrants (78 per cent), with the lowest percentages with such preferences being among the Urban Metropolitan Migrants (41 per cent) and the Urban Non-migrants (32 per cent).

Looking back over all these data, what is indicated? First, from both the Marion County data and from the literature, out-migration is a factor that many small city and rural youth will have to face. In general, it appears that a good proportion of these young persons negotiate this experience successfully, and that a key to that successful negotiation lies in obtaining formal credentials.

To our observations we can add the conclusions of Varden Fuller, who was concerned specifically with the problem of migration off of farms:

> (1) The off-farm migration has not been selective as to inherent ability; nor, to any significant extent,

has migration selection run in favor of the more intelligent and capable. Any deviation from neutrality on this point has been bound up in the career choice-educational complex. Whatever else it is that underlies this observed complex of behavior, the evidence says that a substantial proportion of those not intending to farm held more challenging ambitions than those who did, and that they were motivated to achieve the education appropriate to realizing that ambition.

(2) The model population leaving farms, i.e., under 19, was young enough for further education and training. Those at grade school level have not encountered great difficulty in adapting to urban schools. Those who had finished rural high school were apparently at some disadvantage in entering college or finding jobs in industrial employment

(3) The off-farm migrants have been poor -- comparatively as individuals and from low-income areas of origin....

(4) Off-farm migrants, especially those past youth, have been under severe disabilities in the marketing of their labor services. First, there is the matter of inferior governmental labor market information in rural areas, a deficiency often recognized and commented upon. Second is the matter of being "informed" by relatives, friends and neighbors upon whether to move or not to move, where to go, what kind of work to look for, and where to find it.... (Fuller, 1970: 20).

What Alternatives?

A number of observers have addressed the issues of problems of rural youth, especially in the educational arena, most notably Fuller and also Marshall. These authors tend to provide cogent identification of major issues facing rural youth, such as: (1) the heterogeneity of non-metropolitan settings, which makes any single plan or set of plans difficult, (2) the economic and cultural isolation of such areas, which poses significant problems in assembling resources, (3) the debilitating influence of poverty, especially in such areas as the South, (4) the fact that education and employment training programs are not as readily available, and (5) the economic base of non-metropolitan areas is more limited in what it offers. (See Marshall, 1976: 227-253, especially, for an extended discussion of some of these issues).

Most of these authors suggest some form of strategy which combines educational preparation, opportunities for enhancing successful outmigration, and increased public employment (Marshall, 1976: 227-253).

To these we can add the following thoughts. Given that (1) there is the likelihood that more individuals in the future may be able to consider the possibility of remaining in non-

metropolitan settings, and (2) given also that clearly the basic problem has to do with employment (educational preparation when jobs are non-existent diverts attention from this basic issue of the need to expand the number of work positions available), an innovative approach to public employment in such areas needs to be considered. One such idea can be derived from the "New Careers" strategy first suggested in the 1960's by Pearl and Reissman.

They state, in essence, that human service occupations in the areas of health, education and welfare, where the greatest job growth is occurring, should provide the targets for the employment of the poor. However, since these fields require detailed educational credentials, both new careers and new training opportunities for those seeking these careers must be developed if the poor are to gain access to the fields.

Pearl and Reissman assert that poor untrained persons can serve effectively in a variety of roles in these areas, although these lower level positions would be viewed as entry points in career lines that permit the individual to move up as far as he is able to progress. These entry positions include teacher aides, recreation aides, research asssistants, nurses' aides and other positions for which at least some of the training can be done "on the job."

Perhaps most importantly, development of new career training for youth in non-metropolitan areas offers these young people a means to develop skills and improve their status while providing a way to achieve personal realization and dignity. This process reverses the exclusion process which works against the poor, while providing continued employment in the viable sector of the economy, and provides non-metropolitan youth with the opportunity to learn skills which will be marketable in the metropolitan areas. Given the high percentage of rural youth who migrate to metropolitan areas, this is an important consideration.

However, this new careers concept also offers an opportunity for the non-metropolitan youth to stay in their communities, since the jobs filled are needed in their home areas as well as in the cities. Because much of the training can be provided within existing agency structures, the limited resources of the rural community can be stretched. With more staff persons available, there may be an opportunity to develop needed community resources in areas such as recreation without great additional cost.

The new careers program also removes persons from the group of those needing services, and provides additional staff members at a lower cost, since,at least in the entry level positions, salaries will be lower than those of fully credentialed staff.

Since non-metropolitan areas traditionally have difficulty in attracting professionals in the health, education and welfare areas, in part because almost all graduate training centers are located in the large metropolitan centers, the training programs will provide a method through which the quality of staff available in non-metropolitan areas will gradually improve, as will the lives of the rural youth affected by the new careers program.

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